

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



Issued November, 1914; revised March, 1920; January, 1923.

Rev. ed.
follows

BREEDS OF DRAFT HORSES.

By G. A. BELL,¹

*Senior Animal Husbandman, Animal Husbandry Division,
Bureau of Animal Industry.*

INTRODUCTION.

The production of high-class draft horses for breeding purposes is of particular importance to us at present, for the American breeder

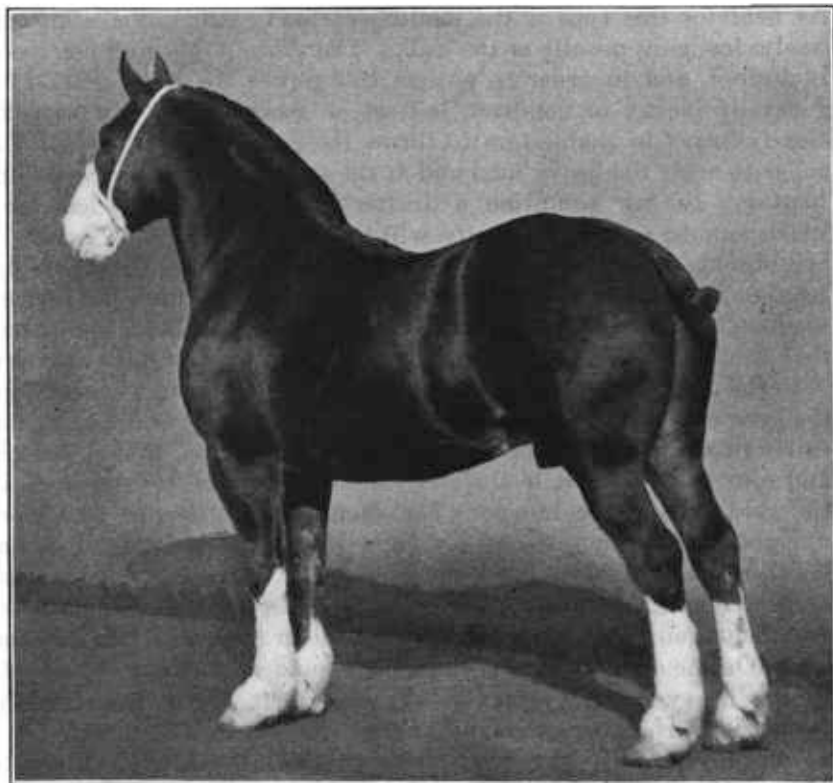


FIG. 1.—A champion draft gelding of excellent type, combining a massive form with good underpinning to an unusual degree.

must rely more than formerly on the home supply of breeding stock, for the supply of such stock in those countries from which we

NOTE.—The respective characteristics and desirable qualities of the several breeds of draft horses in this country are presented in this bulletin.

¹ Mr. Bell resigned from the department October 15, 1920.

formerly imported the bulk of our draft horses was reduced materially during the war.

The purpose of this publication is to present to the reader in a concise manner the most important features regarding the breeds of draft horses in this country. No attempt has been made to give a history of the breeds or information regarding the early types, as such information would require considerable space and would be of little or no value to the general reader. The name and address of the secretary of the pedigree-record society for each breed is given at the conclusion of the portion dealing with that particular breed, and the reader is referred to the various societies for information regarding the rules of registry and the issuance of studbooks, or for lists of breeders.

POINTS OF THE DRAFT HORSE.

The draft type is characterized by massiveness, and the particular field for this type is the hauling of heavy loads at a comparatively slow gait, usually at the walk. Therefore power and not speed is desired, and in order to possess this power the horse should be generally blocky or compact, low-set or short-legged, and be sufficiently heavy to enable him to throw the necessary weight into the collar to move the heavy load and at the same time maintain a secure footing. In fair condition a drafter should weigh not less than 1,600 pounds, and the majority will be between 16 and 17 hands in height, but, of course, many are found below and above these heights. In some localities horses weighing less than 1,600 pounds are termed drafters, but in localities where the heavy draft horse is common they would not be classed as such, unless designated as light drafters.

In the typical drafter the head is comparatively lean, wide between the eyes, and in size proportioned to the body. The eye is bright and fairly prominent. The neck is strong and muscular, of fair length, and somewhat arched; in the stallion it is well arched or crested, in the gelding or mare less so. The shoulders are shorter and more upright than in the case of the light horse, and a happy medium between the straight and sloping shoulder gives the best combination of power and movement. Too straight a shoulder causes excessive concussion, and the result is bone and tendon trouble in the feet and legs. On the other hand, too sloping a shoulder renders it difficult to fit the heavy collars properly. In the draft horse, however, the former is much more common than the latter.

The chest is deep and comparatively broad, thus providing plenty of room for the lungs. The girth, or the body's circumference behind the forelegs, is large, and horses slack in that region are usually weak in constitution. The body is broad, deep, and comparatively short; the back is short and broad, and the ribs well sprung, giving a round appearance to the body. The horse with a shallow body is usually a poor feeder. The loin is broad and well muscled; the croup is fairly level, long, broad, and well muscled. A short, decidedly

sloping croup is not so well muscled as the straighter and longer one. The hindquarters and thighs are well muscled, and it is from the hindquarters that the horse obtains most of its propelling power, the front legs acting largely as weight carriers.

Good underpinning, consisting of good legs and feet, is essential. Good, clean, heavy bone is necessary in order to afford attachments for the heavy muscles and to stand the heavy wear and tear. The cannon bones are the best indication of the bone throughout. In this region the bone should feel firm, and the tendons should stand out distinctly from the bone, giving the cannon bones when viewed from the side a wide, flat appearance. The knee should be broad and deep when viewed from the front. The hock should be broad from front to back, and of strong structure. The pasterns should be fairly long and sloping. While some draft horses possess too long and too sloping pasterns, a much larger number have too short and too straight pasterns. The foot should be fairly large and the horn of the hoof dense. The dark-colored hoofs are the most popular, as it is thought they denote greater durability. In the draft horse as much quality as is consistent with the required substance is desirable, but quality should not be obtained at the sacrifice of too much weight.

In temperament the draft horse is generally lymphatic, but he should not be too sluggish. While the nature of his work requires him to be steady and easily managed, it is nevertheless essential that it should be performed willingly and with some snap and vigor.

The draft-horse gait is the walk. The stride should be rapid and of good length, and the feet should be carried straight forward. This kind of action renders possible the covering of considerable ground in the least possible time. While the walk is the normal gait, the ability to trot well is desirable. Often faults not noticeable at the walk are brought out at the trot.

BELGIAN.

The Belgian draft horse, as the name indicates, originated and has been developed in Belgium, and is the only breed of horses which is bred to any extent in that country, the light horses used in Belgium being purchased largely in other countries. In 1886 the Belgian Draft Horse Society was organized for the purpose of encouraging the breeding of the native draft horse and to maintain a studbook for the breed. In June of each year the annual show of this society is held at Brussels. At the thirtieth annual show, held in June, 1919, the entries totaled more than 800. In 1913 and 1914 the total number of entries for each year was in excess of 1,000, and this is probably the largest show of a single breed of horses held in the world. The breeding of Belgian draft horses is also promoted by the Government, which annually awards prizes and subsidies to the best animals in the various provinces. Stallions which stand for public service must be approved by a commission appointed by the Government.

Importations of these horses into the United States occurred more or less frequently during the last half of the nineteenth century, but it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that they were imported in large numbers. The early trade was principally a stallion trade, but later quite a large number of mares were imported.

The Belgian divides honors with the Shire as being the heaviest of any of our breeds. Mature stallions in fair condition, weighing a ton or more, are comparatively common. In height mature stallions

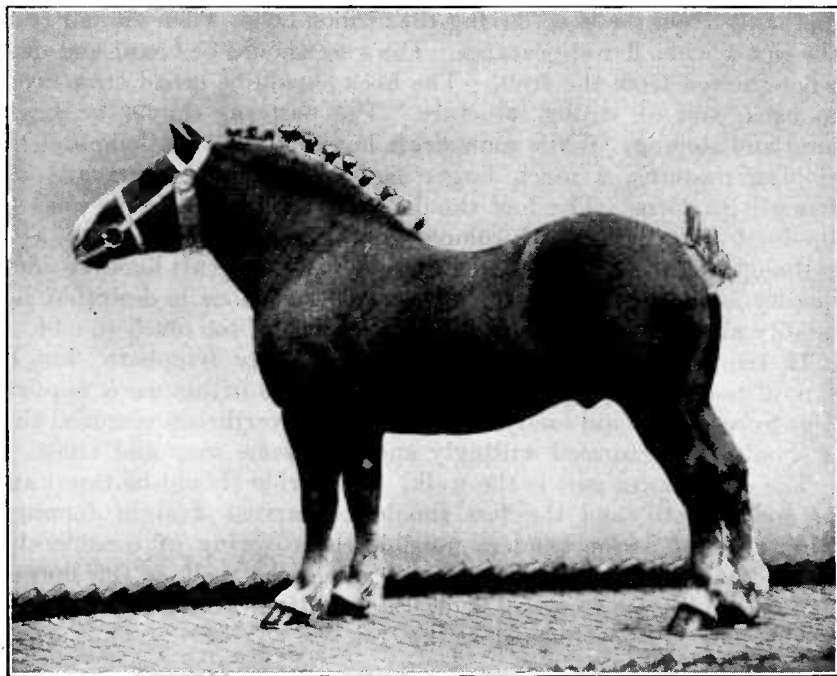


FIG. 2.—Belgian stallion.

will probably average slightly over 16½ hands, and mature mares about 16 hands. In general conformation they are the most compact of any breed, the bodies being short, wide, and deep. The head is of medium size, the neck is short and heavily crested or arched, the chest is broad and deep, the back is short and well muscled over the loin, the croup is somewhat drooping or steep, and the quarters are full and heavily muscled. The legs are short and free from the long hair or feather characteristic of the Clydesdale and Shire. In action the Belgian is good, but is less active than the Clydesdale or

Percheron. In temperament he is docile and easily handled. He is a good feeder, is rated as an easy keeper, and stands shipment well. The colors common to the Belgian are bay, chestnut, and roan, but browns, grays, and blacks are occasionally seen.

Some of the criticisms of the Belgian horse are that a large number have necks that are too short and heavy, too drooping a croup, a roughness about the hocks, bone that is not sufficiently flat, too short and straight in the pastern, hoof deficient in circumference, and a lack of general quality; but great improvement has been noted

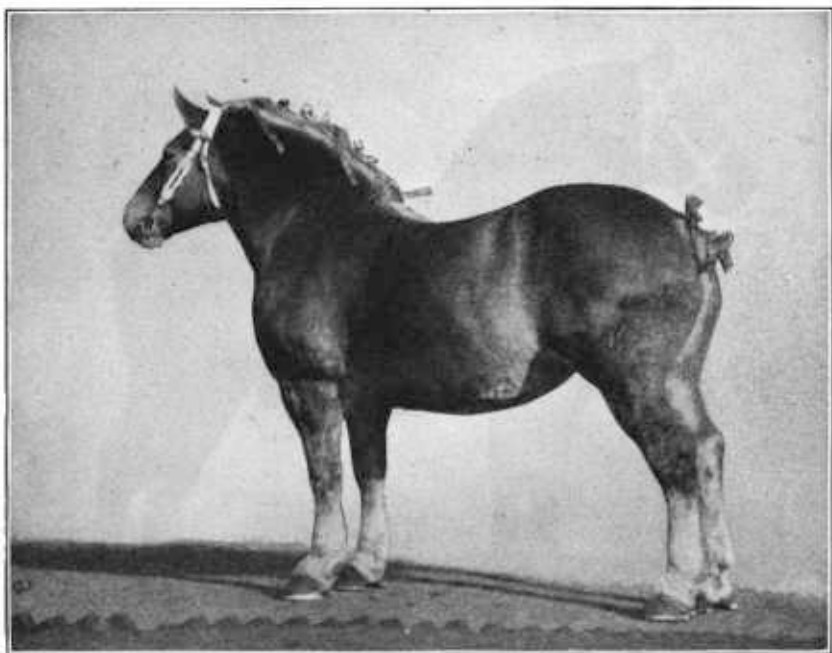


FIG. 3.—Belgian mare.

in respect to these deficiencies in recent years. The extreme width may cause the Belgian to roll somewhat at the walk, but as a class they are good movers at the trot.

In this country the Belgian sire has been valuable in improving the draft conformation of our horse stock, particularly when mated with many of our rangy, loosely coupled mares. The breed has made wonderful progress in this country, considering that it has attracted much attention only during the past 15 or 20 years. In fact, probably no breed has shown a greater increase in popularity and a greater improvement during the past decade.

The distribution of the Belgian draft horse in the United States is widespread, but it is found in the greatest number in those sections where the heaviest type of draft horse is most prevalent, such as the Central West, particularly in Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, and Nebraska.

The American Association of Importers and Breeders of Belgian Draft Horses was organized in 1887, but the first volume of that association's studbook was not published until 1905. To date, however, eight volumes have been issued. Up to March 1, 1921, 12,708 stal-

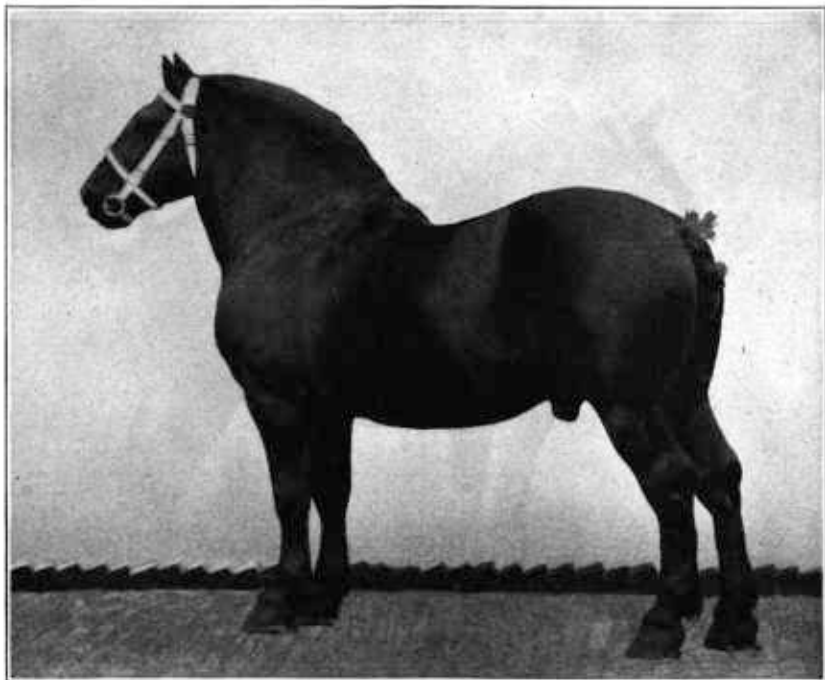


FIG. 4.—Percheron stallion.

lions and 9,203 mares had been recorded. The secretary of the association is J. D. Conner, jr., Wabash, Ind.

PERCHERON.

The Percheron originated in France and has been developed in a small district in the northwestern part of that country known as Perche. This district is about one-fifteenth the size of the State of Iowa, and only Percherons born within its boundaries are eligible to registry in the Percheron Studbook of France. Percheron foals, to be accepted for registry in the French book, must be registered during the year of their birth. Prior to such registration they must

be examined by an official appointed by the Percheron Horse Society of France, who takes a careful description of their color and markings, and who brands them on the neck with the letters "S. P." enclosed.

The Percheron Horse Society of France was organized in 1883, and in addition to looking after the registration of Percherons it holds an annual summer show in the Percheron district. The society also offers prizes at other shows. The improvement of the Percheron and other breeds in France is due to both public and private efforts. The Government has for a number of years maintained studs in



FIG. 5.—American-bred Percheron mare.

which selected animals have been kept for breeding purposes. In addition, subsidies are granted to private individuals in order to keep high-class horses in the stud. Stallions intended to stand for public service in France must be examined by officials appointed by the Government and certified as being free from periodic ophthalmia, or moonblindness, and roaring (thick wind).

The introduction of Percheron horses into the United States dates back many years. One of the early stallions brought to this country which exerted considerable influence on our draft stock was Louis Napoleon, imported in 1851 by an Ohio firm. Other Percherons were imported about this time and during succeeding years.

During the early seventies they were imported in quite large numbers, and these importations have continued to date.

The head of the Percheron is clean-cut, of medium size, and more refinement is noticed about the head and neck of the Percheron than of any other draft breed. The neck is rather short and well crested. The chest is deep and broad, the back is short, the loins smooth and well muscled. The croup is wide, and on the average is somewhat more sloping than is considered desirable, but great improvement in this respect has been made in recent years. The legs, feet, and bone are on the average good. The legs are free from the long hair or feather characteristic of the Clydesdale and Shire. In action the Percheron is good at both the trot and the walk, and the trot is characterized by a snap and boldness not ordinarily displayed by the other draft breeds. This breed may be regarded as one of the best movers and is surpassed in style of action only by the Clydesdale.

The Percheron is not so large a horse as either the Belgian or the Shire, but as a class will probably outweigh the Clydesdale slightly. Good, mature stallions in fair condition will usually weigh from 1,800 to 2,000 pounds, and there are many which weigh considerably over 2,000 pounds. In height good, mature stallions will measure 16 to 17 hands, with a general average of about $16\frac{1}{2}$ hands, but of course there are some under and a few over these heights, although the rangy, tall Percheron is not in demand in this country. The popular Percheron is rather short-legged, compact, and blocky in form, less so than the Belgian, but more so than the Clydesdale or even the Shire.

The colors common to the Percheron are black and gray, although bays, browns, chestnuts, and roans are occasionally seen. It may be safely stated, however, that 90 per cent of our Percherons are either black or gray.

While occasionally difficulty may be experienced in deciding whether an animal is a Percheron or a Belgian, the two types are quite distinct. The Belgian is heavier bodied, more compact, shorter legged, and his head is more square in outline; the neck is shorter, more heavily muscled, and more heavily crested. Moreover, the colors common to the Belgian—namely, bay, chestnut, and roan—are uncommon to the Percheron, while the gray and black colors common to the latter are uncommon in the Belgian.

Some Percherons are criticized as having croups too sloping or steep, with the tail set too low. Others are criticized as being too fine—not sufficiently drafty—having a lack of depth and fullness of body. Other faults which are sometimes seen are cannon bones which are rather round, lacking in breadth and flatness, lack of bone for the size of the body, and pasterns which are too short and straight.

The distribution of the Percheron horse in this country is widespread, and for years he has been the favorite drafter of the American people. In the United States to-day Percherons outnumber all other draft breeds combined, and there does not appear to be any diminution in their popularity. This probably is due in part to the good start given the breed by the pioneer importers and breeders, but this popularity must be attributed to some extent, at least, to their general adaptability to meet the needs and desires of the American people. For crossing on ordinary mares the Percheron stallion has been very popular, so that grade Percherons are very common, and are great favorites in our horse markets.

In 1876 the National Association of Importers and Breeders of Percheron-Norman Horses was organized. The Percheron Society of America is an outgrowth of that association. The twenty-first volume of the studbook of this society was issued in February, 1921. Up to November 1, 1921, over 160,000 animals had been accepted for registration. The secretary of the Percheron Society of America is Ellis McFarland, Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.

FRENCH DRAFT.

The name "French Draft" is applied broadly to all the breeds of draft horses in France, including the Percheron. In addition to the Percheron, there are a number of other draft breeds in France, such as the Boulonnais, Nivernais, and others. Of these, the Percheron is by far the best known, and has obtained a foothold in this country much greater than that of any other French breed of draft horses. Of the other breeds, the Boulonnais and Nivernais are the only ones of any particular interest in this country.

The Boulonnais is found in northern France in the vicinity of Boulogne. This breed is probably a trifle larger than the Percheron and somewhat coarser, but in general type resembles the Percheron quite closely. The color common to the Boulonnais is gray, but occasionally other colors are seen. This breed has been imported in larger numbers than the Nivernais.

The home of the Nivernais is in central France, in the Department of Nievre. In type it is quite similar to the Percheron. The color is black.

The National French Draft Horse Association of America publishes a studbook, in which may be registered any of the French Draft breeds. The association was organized in 1876, under the name of the National Norman Horse Association, but the name was changed in 1884 to the National French Draft Horse Association. Fourteen volumes of the studbook have been published, and up to January 1, 1922, 33,872 animals were registered. The secretary of this association is C. E. Stubbs, Fairfield, Iowa.

CLYDESDALE.

The Clydesdale originated and has been developed in Scotland, and is practically the only draft horse found in that country. The breed is of mixed origin, and the early history is more or less obscure. It is probable that the blood of both Flemish and English horses entered quite largely into the breed during its early history. For a number of years, however, the Clydesdale has been bred pure. In 1878 the Clydesdale Horse Society of Great Britain and Ireland was organized.

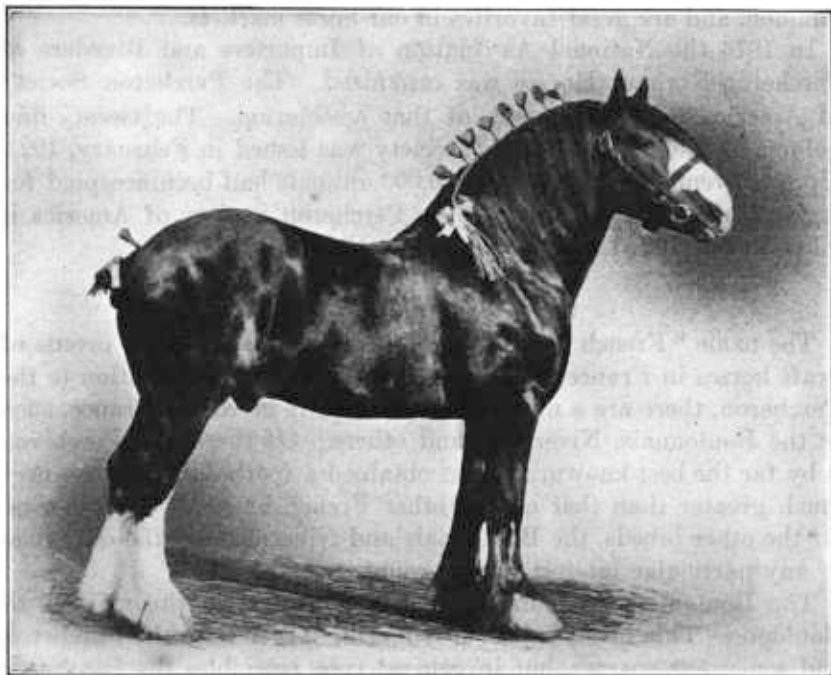


FIG. 6.—Clydesdale stallion.

The first Clydesdales brought to North America were probably imported into Canada by the Scotch who had settled there. In the early seventies Clydesdales were imported into this country both through Canada and by direct importation. By 1880 they were being imported in large numbers, and these importations continued for several years.

The Clydesdale is not as heavy as either the Belgian or the Shire, and probably, as a class, will not weigh quite as much as the Percheron. The Clydesdale is more rangy and lacks the width and compactness of the breeds mentioned. The Scotch breeders have paid particular

attention to legs, pasterns, and feet, but have placed less emphasis on weight than has been the case in other breeds. Average mature Clydesdale stallions in this country will probably weigh 1,700 to 1,900 pounds when in fair condition, with an average height of nearly 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ hands. Mature mares will probably weigh 1,600 to 1,800 pounds and average about 16 hands in height.

No other draft breed equals the Clydesdale in style and action. The prompt walk with a good, snappy stride, and a sharp trot with hocks well flexed and carried close together are characteristic of this breed. Good clean, flat bone; well-set, fairly long and sloping

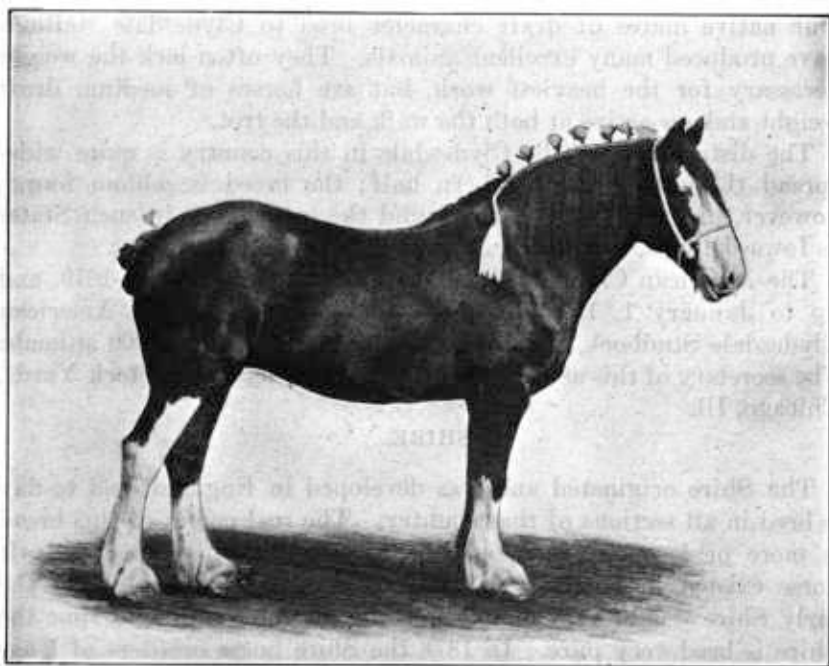


FIG. 7.—Clydesdale mare.

pasterns; and a moderate amount of fine feather or long hair at the rear of the legs below the knees and hocks are important and characteristic features. The colors most common are bay and brown with white markings, but blacks, grays, chestnuts, and roans are occasionally seen. The white markings are characteristic, and it is the exception to see a bay or brown Clydesdale without a white face and considerable white on the feet and legs.

Some of the criticisms of this breed have been the lack of size of body, lack of width and depth, too much feather, and too much white with no regularity of distribution. The average American does not like a horse decorated with a white face and legs. Nor has the

feather been popular with Americans, owing to the care necessary to keep the feet and legs clean. This, of course, is not so objectionable in countries where most of the roads are improved.

It is not always easy to differentiate between Clydesdales and Shires, but taking the breeds as a whole they are quite distinct. The Clydesdale is not as heavy bodied as the Shire, has more refinement, and the feather is somewhat more silky or finer and less abundant than in the Shire.

In this country Clydesdale geldings have been quite popular in the cities for use by those who want draft horses with a good, long, snappy stride, and at the same time possessing style and action. Our native mares of draft character bred to Clydesdale stallions have produced many excellent animals. They often lack the weight necessary for the heaviest work, but are horses of medium draft weight and are active at both the walk and the trot.

The distribution of the Clydesdale in this country is quite widespread throughout the northern half; the breed is seldom found, however, in the South. It has found the most favor in such States as Iowa, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.

The American Clydesdale Association was organized in 1879, and up to January 1, 1922, had issued 21 volumes of the American Clydesdale Studbook, containing the registrations of 21,000 animals. The secretary of this association is R. B. Ogilvie, Union Stock Yards, Chicago, Ill.

SHIRE.

The Shire originated and was developed in England, and to-day is bred in all sections of that country. The real origin of this breed is more or less speculative. It is known that this type of draft horse existed in England in early times. It is probable that the early Shire was of very mixed breeding, but at the present time the Shire is bred very pure. In 1878 the Shire horse breeders of England were organized under the name of the English Cart Horse Society. In 1884 the name was changed to the Shire Horse Society. In addition to the registration of horses, the society holds an annual show and sale in London, and also awards medals and prizes at the leading agricultural shows in England and at some of the fairs and expositions in the United States.

Shires were imported into this country a good many years ago. Mr. George E. Brown, in volume 1 of the American Shire Horse Studbook, states that in 1853 a Mr. Strickland imported a stallion direct from England to Aurora, Ill., where the horse was known as John Bull. Volume 1 of this studbook shows the registration of a small number of stallions imported in 1880, and these importations increased until in 1887 more than 400 Shires were imported.

The Shire is a massive horse, with a wide, deep, and long body, and is equaled in weight only by the Belgian. Shire stallions in fair condition weighing 2,000 pounds or over are comparatively common. They are less compact, or more rangy, than the Belgian, and in height will average taller than any other draft breed. Stallions standing 17 hands or more in height are quite common; in fact, probably the average height of mature Shire stallions in this country is close to 17 hands. Mature Shire mares will average about 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ hands in height and will, in fair condition, average about 1,800

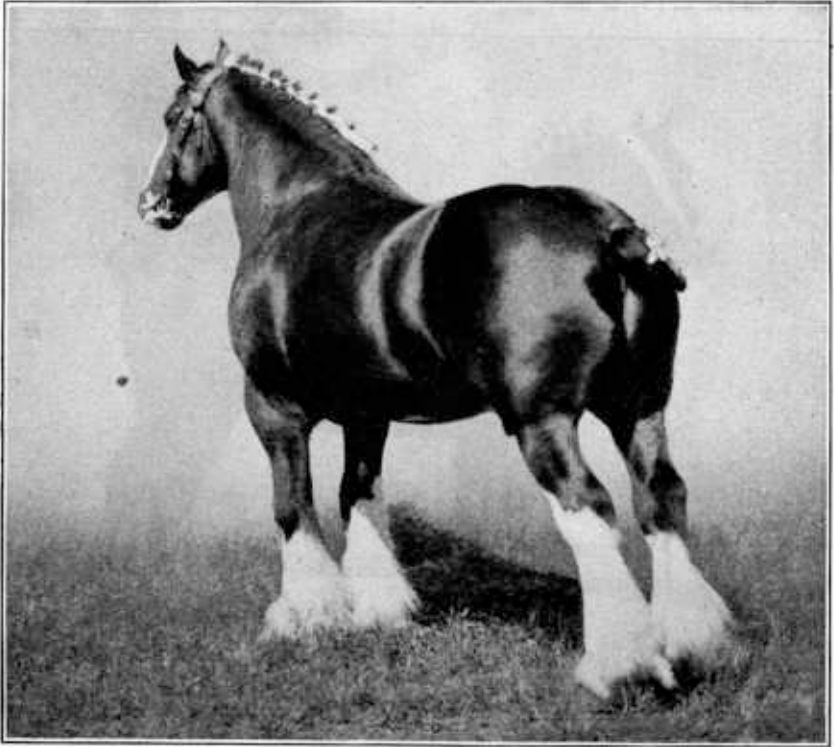


FIG. 8.—Shire stallion.

pounds in weight. Heavy bone and feather are characteristic of this breed. In temperament the Shire is probably more lymphatic than any of our other breeds, and therefore less active than is desired by many. The common colors are bay and brown, with white markings, although blacks, grays, chestnuts, and roans are occasionally seen.

This breed has been criticized for lack of quality and refinement in general, a sluggish temperament, the abundance of feather, and the large amount of white, but breeders have shown marked progress in overcoming these objections during the last few years. From the American standpoint the abundant feather is objectionable, owing to the difficulty of keeping the legs clean.

While many Shires and Clydesdales are so similar as to render it difficult at times to distinguish the one from the other, the two types are quite distinct. The Shire is more massive, heavier bodied throughout, and the feather or long hair on the legs is more abundant and coarser than that of the Clydesdale.

The distribution of the Shire throughout the northern half of this country is quite widespread, but, like the Clydesdale, it is seldom found in our Southern States. This breed has met with the most favor in the Central West, particularly in Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, and Nebraska; it is also popular on the Pacific coast in the States of

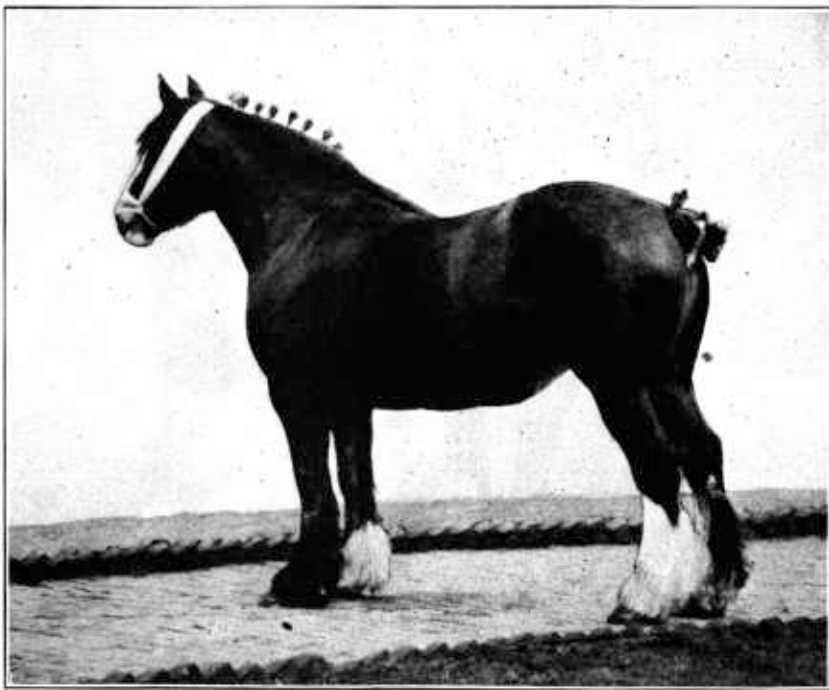


FIG. 9.—Shire mare.

Washington, Oregon, and California. A great many of our best market geldings possess some Shire blood; and where height as well as bone and substance is desired, it can be derived from Shire blood with greater certainty than from other breeds.

The American Shire Horse Association was organized in 1885, and has issued eleven volumes of its studbook and recorded over 19,380 animals. The secretary is W. G. Lynch, Tonica, Ill.

SUFFOLK.

The native home of the Suffolk breed is Suffolk County, in eastern England, and the production of the breed in that country is confined

almost entirely to that and adjoining counties. The Suffolk has not been bred for the heavy draft work of the city, but largely for the farm, and for this purpose it ranks high among the farmers of eastern England, who consider it capable of doing a large amount of labor on a small amount of feed and for longer periods than other drafters. The breed is used more exclusively for farm work than any other of our draft breeds.

In size the Suffolk is smaller than other drafters; and while occasionally a mature stallion in fair condition may weigh 2,000 pounds, such a weight is not characteristic of the breed. Considering their

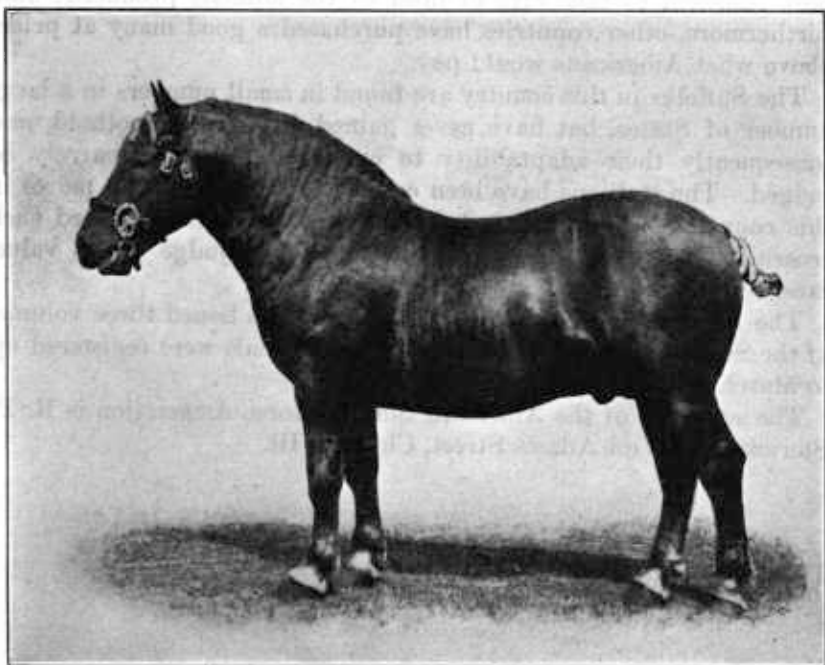


FIG. 10.—Suffolk stallion.

size, the Suffolks have a deep and wide body, and the ribs have a pronounced spring, giving the body a round and full appearance. The croup is straight, the sloping croup being seldom seen in this breed. The quarters are round and well muscled. The legs are short and are particularly free from long hair or feather, and the bone has the appearance of being small compared with the size of the body. The color is always chestnut, varying from light to dark. The Suffolk is active, has a good disposition, and is rated as an easy keeper.

The distinguishing characteristics of this breed may be said to be the invariable chestnut color, with little if any white; their smooth, rotund form; and the clean-boned leg, devoid of the feather characteristic of the other two British draft breeds.

The breed is criticized for the lack of size to supply the heavy-draft type demanded for the heavy hauling in the cities and for being too light in bone for the size of the body.

Suffolks were first imported into this country in the early eighties and have been imported since then in small numbers, but have never gained a very strong foothold here. One reason for this has no doubt been due to the lack of size as compared with other draft breeds. Another reason why no more have been imported has probably been that they have not been bred in very large numbers in England, being confined to a limited area, and the home demand by the farmers has been sufficient to take care of most of the animals produced; and, furthermore, other countries have purchased a good many at prices above what Americans would pay.

The Suffolks in this country are found in small numbers in a large number of States, but have never gained any strong foothold, and consequently their adaptability to our conditions can scarcely be judged. The stallions have been crossed to some extent on mares in this country, but the demand for extreme size has prevented such crossing from being carried on sufficiently to judge of its value, except in a small way.

The American Suffolk Horse Association has issued three volumes of the Suffolk Horse Studbook, and 1,356 animals were registered up to March 4, 1922.

The secretary of the American Suffolk Horse Association is R. P. Stericker, 72 West Adams Street, Chicago, Ill.